



AETC News Clips

Laughlin AFB, Texas



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Med Group commander exhorts participation

By Bill Sontag

A scant 25 Air Force retirees and active duty members took advantage of the second "Town Hall" presentation and question-and-answer event sponsored Dec. 14 by the 47th Medical Group at Laughlin Air Force Base.

The diminutive audience was in sharp contrast to the very vocal, challenging crowd of 200 that nearly filled the base theater on March 29, but the mission for the afternoon was similar.

Col. Laura Torres-Reyes wanted to touch base with any customers of the Laughlin clinic and Air Force medical programs and insurance who might have questions or gripes to air. In March, questions and gripes were loud and abundant. In mid-December, they were few and civil.

In March, Torres-Reyes admitted to the News-Herald that customer communications and staff accessibility are everything in the eyes of clinic users. Accordingly, she told the December audience substantive update of the clinic's phone system was concluded in May, resulting in positive comments from users.

Status of other efforts includes:

- Phase I of the clinic rehabilitation and modernization program was completed in August, and is still underway.
- Customer service training for staff members is slated for January 2006.
- A Referral Management Center, to facilitate appointments at medical facilities in San Antonio, should commence service in January 2006, yielding comprehensive appointment dates and arrangements.
- The clinic renovation underway will result in better utilization of space; it will not feature new services.
- More case managers are on staff to improve service, diminish waiting times.

After emphasizing that clinic staff members are extraordinarily patient-sensitive, Torres-Reyes strove to hammer home an important message to all patients and potential patients: "You are the reason we're here!"

The med group commander told audience members to ensure their records show the proper, current address and phone number. Torres-Reyes urged the audience to get on the Internet, and gather information. In particular, she singled out the TRICARE Insurance site, www.tricareonline.com, for military insurance information.

Torres-Reyes presented a graphic program of projected messages and information. In urging patients to be participants in their health care, Torres-Reyes said patients must "Take Charge!" In particular, she commended those who are persistent in asking questions of physicians and medical staff, to the satisfaction of the patient or loved ones.

"If you leave the doctor's office without asking questions, shame on you!" Torres-Reyes exclaimed, adding, "You are the one responsible to take care of you."

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She urged patients to call as soon as medical problems show up. "Don't wait for three or four problems to accumulate." Torres-Reyes cautioned that patients shouldn't attempt to self-diagnose, but she did encourage them to "gather as much trustworthy information as you can on your condition."

Finally, Torres-Reyes told attendees that they must follow up on to hear all laboratory results, X-rays, and patient-physician consultations.

During patient visits to the Laughlin Clinic, Torres-Reyes reminded the audience to take along a complete list of medications, dosage information, and frequency of application. In addition, she suggested a log of allergies and reactions to each and all medications, as well as a history of all illnesses and surgeries.

Finally, Torres-Reyes advised all patients to take a notebook to their appointment, with questions jotted down before the appointment, including tips for preventive care.

Few questions were asked at the end of the one-hour presentation. One retiree asked if retirees are "pushed back" in obtaining appointments at the Laughlin Clinic.

"Maybe," Torres-Reyes said, replying that active duty military will always have first priority (a mission response), and TRICARE Prime policy-holders get high priority scheduling, too. TRICARE Standard policy holders may receive lower priority assistance, but "You will be served."

A retiree spouse asked if clinic computers can effectively communicate with the Air Force's Wilford Hall Medical Center in San Antonio. "Kinda," said Torres-Reyes. "Some lab results can be accessed, but not much else. We're working on it."

Torres-Reyes has commanded the 47th Medical Group since May 2004, but will be leaving Laughlin soon. On or before Feb. 23, 2006, Torres-Reyes will learn what her next assignment will be, and "no," she has no idea what the process will yield, only that she'll have a "PCS" (Permanent Change of Station) in July 2006.

At the "Town Hall" meeting, Torres-Reyes introduced a relatively recent colleague. Maj. Kevin VanValkenburg, a four-year family practice specialist from Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, is now chief of staff at the Laughlin Clinic.

VanValkenburg and Torres-Reyes are both proud of the results coming to them on the customer-oriented changes implemented at Laughlin Clinic, in large measure triggered by comments received both formally and informally.

Laughlin's Service Delivery Assessment gauges patient satisfaction with a range of questions asked by phone, with data collected by an Air Force-wide contract to get independent viewpoints and analyses.

"Our customer service satisfaction is steadily improving," said Torres-Reyes.

Add T-R's E-mail of questions asked on evaluation survey.

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AETC News Clips

Luke AFB, Ariz.



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14 illegal immigrants rescued on remote Air Force range

PHOENIX (Associated Press) — U.S. Border Patrol agents rescued 14 illegal immigrants from a remote Air Force target range in southwestern Arizona on Christmas night after they had been lost in the desert for more than a day.

The migrants — five children, five women and four men — activated an emergency rescue beacon installed on the Barry M. Goldwater Bombing Range, southeast of Yuma, at about 9. Border Patrol officials said the entrants were abandoned by a smuggler on Saturday when they couldn't keep up with him and the other seven members of their group.

The group wandered in the desert all day Sunday before spotting the rescue beacon's strobe light after dark. The group members activated it out of desperation and were soon rescued, spokesman Michael Gramley said.

The Border Patrol said the migrants were about 25 miles from civilization when they were found.

The Border Patrol rescue beacons have signs warning migrants that they may die if they try to continue across the desert on foot instead of using the device to call for help.

Hundreds of illegal immigrants are known to have died while crossing the deserts along the Mexico-Arizona border in the past two years.

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AETC News Clips

Maxwell AFB, Ala.



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Maxwell projects to get \$24M

By Greg Wright
Montgomery Advertiser

WASHINGTON -- Military installations in Montgomery, including Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base, are slated to get \$24 million for construction projects in defense spending bills Congress passed this week.

"The passage of these annual defense bills, usually some of the last bills to be enacted into law each year, are important to the 2nd District because of our strong military presence," Rep. Terry Everett, R-Rehobeth, said in a statement.

The Alabama projects were included in a \$453 billion defense spending bill for fiscal 2006 and a separate defense bill that authorizes military initiatives. The Senate passed the bills late Wednesday but the defense spending bill had to go back to the House because senators stripped from it a controversial proposal to open Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to gas and oil exploration.

The House, which had adjourned Monday, returned and passed the military spending bill by voice vote Thursday afternoon.

The bills include a 3.1 percent across-the-board pay raise for active-duty personnel, Everett said. The Pentagon also will give some reservists money to help match their preactivation earnings, he said. The amount is capped at \$3,000 a month.

"This is to make those guys whole," said Wade Heck, Everett's chief of staff.

The bills also have money for military projects in Montgomery and Troy in Pike County, 50 miles to the southeast:

Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base will get \$14.9 million to build Squadron Officer College lodging. The dormitory-style housing is expected to have 162 occupants. Construction bids have not opened so a completion date is not set, Air University spokesman Capt. Tim Wade said.

The 187th Air Guard at Montgomery Regional Airport will get \$9.1 million for a 43,000-square-foot, two-story operation and training facility. The building, scheduled to open in early 2008, will put Air Guard offices scattered across the base into one building and replace older facilities, some of which date to the 1950s, said Maj. Paul Griggs, the 187th's executive officer.

There is \$690 million to build H-60 Blackhawk helicopters nationwide, Everett said. The helicopters are produced partially at GKN aerospace plants in Tallahassee and Montgomery.

Lockheed Martin will get \$70 million for Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles produced nationally, Everett said. The missiles are made partially in Troy, he said.

The defense bills also have \$30 million for the Joint Common Missile (JCM) program, which the Bush administration wanted to end, said Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Tuscaloosa. JCM is a next-generation, air-to-ground missile used by the Army, Navy and Marine Corps, he said.

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Lockheed Martin makes the missiles. More than 150 Alabama jobs are tied to the program, Shelby said.